

This Is Jesus: To the Ends of the Earth
The Upside Down Community
April 8, 2018

Worship Songs – Made New/The Sound That Saves Us All

Drama – The Makeover

Feature – Shiny Happy People ‘

Closing Song – If We’re Honest

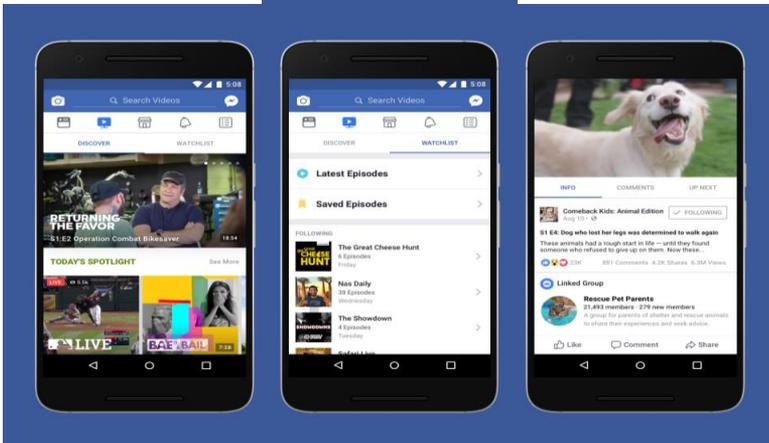
Introduction

Shiny happy people. Everywhere.
Holding hands. Throwing love around.
There's no time to cry, just happy,
happy, happy. When I hear these words
from that 90's song by REM, I feel like
this is a pretty good description of
what our networked society has
become over the past 15 years ...a
group of image conscious - appearance
enhanced - reputation protecting shiny
people. We have become a society that

puts a premium on looking good, dressing right and presenting ourselves well. Shiny people have all the outward appearances of success. They are envied for their accomplishments and their can't miss lifestyles, yet they hide anything that makes themselves look bad.

There's no better place for shiny happy people to proclaim their accomplishments, polish up their images or post their pursuits than on the app we all know as

facebook



It's a great hangout for shiny happy people. Have you noticed how everyone on Facebook looks like they're having a great time? Fun adventures, deep romances, amazing jobs. It's enough to make you feel inadequate, but it's also a lie. Nobody is really as happy as their Facebook wall claims but they sure want you think they are. Interestingly enough, I ran across a related article in Forbes magazine entitled,

How to Be More "Popular" On Facebook:

- *Post And Delete*
- *Ask Compelling Questions*
- *Pose With A Celebrity*
- *Juice Your Photos*



Those who followed Jesus turned the world upside down for good
Why – and how - and they do it? Could it still work today?

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Post And Delete

If a post of yours isn't drawing Likes/Shares/Comments in the first half hour, delete it.

Ask Compelling Questions

If you post questions like: “Who's the greatest athlete of all time and why?”, you'll get more action from people who like feeling smart by weighing in with good answers.

Pose With A Celebrity

Get a photo of yourself alongside George Clooney or Tin Fey and you're good for a quick 50 likes.

Juice Your Photos

Sweeten up your photos (on Instagram, in iPhoto or with Facebook's photo adjust options) before uploading to Facebook.

Now it's important for you to know that I do have a Facebook account. I

check it about a 3-4 times a week but not daily. I know it's a good tool for keeping track of friends, relatives and what's going on in places like our church. NHCC posts things all the time on our Facebook page.

In addition, I've seen some very positive things come about because of Facebook. It's done a lot of good for people who have found long lost relatives, or those who have received much needed financial assistance from their GoFundMe pages.

But while much good can be found there, it has become a haven for shiny happy people who are interested in making themselves look better than they really are.

Unfortunately, much of Facebook has become a narcissistic playground

where the best, the funniest, the most charming aspects of our lives are publicized and all the ugly stuff, the boring stuff, the beige that represents most of our daily grind almost never gets posted.

Many Facebook walls are, at best, a distorted mirror image of real life or, at worst, nothing more than a fictional movie of how we want people to see us. We want to be and be seen as shiny happy people. Who wouldn't?

But where has all this “pursuit of shiny-ness” gotten us (in our real life or our Facebook life)? What negative effects has it had on us as a society? On us as individuals? On us as a church? What alternative does Jesus offer us?

That's what we are going to look at today. Today we are going to explore

the antidote for shiny-ness. Today I want us to look at what it means to practice upside down community...the Jesus way!

Review

For those of you who are new here today, we are in part IV of our “This is Jesus” mega series. Part IV of this series is called “To the Ends of the Earth”, and we are looking at what happened when those who followed Jesus turned the whole world upside down for good as they brought his ways to the ends of earth. We are trying to discover why and how they did it and could it still work for us today.

Last week, Rick kicked off the new series by looking at what happened after Jesus was crucified. We learned that the rise of Christianity was a

direct challenge to the established order that existed at the time. The first Christians were convinced that Jesus – not Caesar – was reigning as King of the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they went everywhere proclaiming this news and inviting others to join them in the “upside-down” life of the Kingdom of God.

Why did they proclaim such a crazy and dangerous thing? Because they believed God had raised Jesus from the dead. They believed that their King was **STILL** alive and on his throne.

The “Shiny-ness” Syndrome

That was last week. This week we want to focus on a different aspect of this upside-down way of living. As I said in the beginning of this message, one of the biggest threats to our practice of

living in community is the “shiny-ness” syndrome.

The “Shiny-ness Syndrome”:

Occurs whenever we attempt to present ourselves to the world as better, smarter, richer, happier, wealthier, or “more together” than we really are.



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The felt need to be shiny on the outside often surfaces when things in our life start to deteriorate or bad things happen. Maybe we lose our job, our marriage, or our health. Or maybe we lose a close friend or our reputation or emotional health or become disillusioned with God.

Whatever it may be, we often feel the need to project an outward facade of “shiny-ness” to avoid pain and

humiliation. We falsely believe that it's easier or better for us if we fake it to make it.

But here's the real truth: when we start acting like this we are in denial, and we would probably be offended if anyone called us what we really are: a hypocrite. To us, the word "hypocrite" suggests something nasty or sinister. But many of us know the reality of our brokenness but are too ashamed or afraid to admit it. The truth is, our false projections are all part of a giant (though largely unconscious) sham.

Unfortunately, we live in a society where a premium is placed on self-reliance and our own needs and comforts. As a result, we who are Christians must retrain our minds. We must not all allow ourselves to be conformed to the superficial standard

of the world around us. We must go deeper and be more authentic than what those around us. We must open our lives to one another, sharing not only our joys but our sorrows.

But how do we do that? How do we move from pseudo, shiny community to real upside-down community the way Jesus intended? To find the answer to that question, I want us to look at a passage in the book Acts that will shed some light on what real community looks like and how we can experience it.

The Upside Down Community

Let's read Acts. 4:32-33.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:32-33 ESV



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One of the most important characteristics of the early church was the fact they shared life together. They were one. They were unified. . They weren't in it for themselves. And we know this because the verses we just read said the “those who believed were “of one heart and soul”. What exactly does it mean to be “of one heart and soul”? Let's break this down one word at a time.

In this verse the word “heart” is used for the human spirit. It's the deepest

part of our lives, the most essential part of our nature. At the deepest level of their lives the New Testament believers belonged to one another. They shared something very deep with each other and so do we. The commonality they and we share is the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in each of our hearts for those of us who are Christ followers.

But there's another way ...

Oneness of "Heart and Soul"

We share "one heart" with one another by believing and valuing the same things.



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For example, those of us who are Christ followers at NHCC believe in the same essentials doctrines of the Christian faith like the deity of Christ, the authority of the Bible and that salvation is by faith alone in what Jesus did for us on the cross.

We also fundamentally agree on our mission to reach seekers, build a family and impact our community and we agree on core values like relational integrity, authenticity and dependence on God.

You see, believing and valuing these things as a community makes us all of “one heart” here at NHCC. But here’s the catch...sharing the same beliefs and values isn’t enough to build us into a unified biblical community. For us to be the “upside down community” that

Jesus intended us to be, we must also be of “one soul”.

How do we become “one soul?” If being of “one heart” means we share deeply held beliefs and values as Christians, then being one soul...

Oneness of “Heart and Soul”

We share “one soul” when we share and enter into life’s experiences with one another.



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We share what’s going on, on the inside as well as well as what’s happening on the outside of our lives. If the “heart” is the deepest part of you, then the soul is the area of your personality. It includes your thoughts, emotions and desires. It’s the realm of experience.

When you do life with someone and you share “your soul” with them, you are sharing experiences with one another. This is what we mean by unity of soul. You feel it, experience it, and emotionally express your life with one another. This should part of our daily Christian experience.

Contrast this with the “shiny-ness” we mentioned early. Shiny people hide. They don’t want to be known. They don’t want you to see the mess they are inside. They don’t want to reveal their brokenness. They want to project a facade or “image” of themselves that’s pleasing, successful, likeable, and independent. They want to hide the ugliness and failure they feel deep inside.

But the members of the body of Christ are to be just the opposite.

Oneness of “Heart and Soul”

The upside-down community of the church is supposed to be the **safest place on earth** for you to be the truest expression of yourself.



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The Lord intends for us to experience “oneness” of soul, to share our lives deeply with one another, to encourage one another with forgiveness, and compassion and faith, to bear one another’s burdens emotionally and even physically. Around here we call this...

Authenticity:

Sharing at appropriate levels of honesty, transparency, and vulnerability so that we present a true picture of ourselves (not a shiny facade) and what it means to follow Christ.



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In the past, when I've shared my humiliation and pain, such as my past struggles with pornography, or my son's decade long rebellion and substance abuse, many of you have entered into my brokenness.

And when I've shared my "highs", like the birth of my second granddaughter last week, many of you who know my daughter Abby have come to me and shared my joy as well.

The truth is I can share my life authentically with you, but you and I

can only become “one in soul” when we both enter into each other’s joy and my pain. And when I share my joy and pain with you and you do the same with me, we are both less likely to become focused only on ourselves and our shiny exterior.

Instead, we both can experience a deep sense “belonging” and become “one soul, just like Jesus meant for it to be in this upside down community.

Radical Generosity

Let’s push pause for a second to review what we learned from Acts 4. New Testament believers shared “one life”, one heart and one soul as they did life together the “upside-down” Jesus way. They shared a common faith in Jesus. They shared a common set of core beliefs and values that made them of “one heart”. They shared common experiences, with authenticity and

vulnerability that made them of “one soul”.

This type of community defined the early church and should define all of us as well. But it doesn't stop there. When we are truly living out this oneness of “heart” and “soul” an amazing thing happens. This oneness overflows into radical generosity toward one another. Look with me at again at Acts 4:

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great (abundant) grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:32,33 ESV



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One of the most amazing results of this oneness in the early church is that it overflowed into “abundant” grace. What exactly did Luke mean when he said that great (abundant) grace was

on them all? We find the answer to that question in vs. 34, 35.

For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Acts 4: 34, 35 NASB



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The reason Luke says that there abundant grace was upon the church was because there was not a needy person among them. These early Christians were of one heart and soul. They shared the same divine life and they shared the same experience of

that life. And

Radical Generosity

Out of all that unity flowed the desire to meet one another's needs.



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They felt a part of each other and so they felt a deep responsibility to do whatever they could to help their brothers and sisters who were in need. They knew one another well enough to care and they cared enough to share everything they had. The love of God was flowing through them and the result was all their material needs were met.

To put it simply, they took care of each other--not because they had to, but

because they wanted to. Not because of some law commanded it but because the love in their hearts demanded it.

Now before some of you think this looks like some form of communism consider this: This was no forced distribution of wealth. This was all done under the free will banner of love. What we see going on here is each individual loving each other and recognizing that nothing they possessed was truly their own anyway. They still had possessions, but the desire to share those possessions was greater than the desire to hoard and keep them just for themselves. This is the church functioning the way it was intended to be.

Radical Generosity

This is what will capture the world's attention: a unity of heart and soul that overflows in an abundance of grace and generosity toward all who are in need.



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This is the kind of radical generosity is manifesting itself at NHCC. Over the past 12 months

NHCC's Radical Generosity (last year)

\$46,000 given to those in need during 2017

\$10,200 given to needy families last Christmas

\$55,000 of donations & fund-raising activities
for our impact partners.

Total: > \$100,000 of abundant grace!



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And the most ironic thing about this radical generosity is that you all keep giving about as fast as we can give it out!! Truly abundant grace is evident right here within the walls of NHCC.

Now I could stop the message right here, and conclude it by saying that when we collectively become one in heart and soul and when that oneness overflows into radical generosity, God is glorified and the world will take notice. But there's one more important illustration that I want to share with you that provides an inspiring example of real upside down community.

Barnabas: poster boy for authentic community

For the church to function the way it was intended to be, it must be made up of broken, authentic, transparent,

loving people. And Luke gives us an example of one such a person at the end of Chap. 4 in verses 36, 37:

Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4:36,37 ESV



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The question that comes to mind when you read these verses is “why did Luke choose this guy Barnabas to illustrate this idea of radical generosity?” Why did he single out this one act of giving as to set it above all the others?

It is true that Barnabas goes on to play a major role in the later stages of the book of Acts but that alone doesn't

seem to explain his inclusion here in Acts 4. Why make such a display out of Barnabas?

The answer, I think, is found in the difference between broken people and shiny people. The answer is found in Luke's little description of Barnabas in v. 36. Look at it again:

Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement)

Acts 4:36 ESV



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Joseph is his given name and Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”) is his nickname. Barnabas has that

special gift, like some of you here today, of lifting people up and restoring them and encouraging them to continue in the faith.

It was Barnabas who took young John Mark under his wing when he was crushed and humiliated by his failure during the first missionary journey of Paul we read about in this book. Boy how we need more Barnabases in our churches today. There are plenty of “sons of DIScouragement” in the church. But we need more sons of encouragement.

Now the question is what exactly did Barnabas do here that was so encouraging besides sell some land? If you read carefully, it wasn't “Barnabas” who owned a tract of land and sold it and laid it at the apostle's feet. It was Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian

birth. Oh, they are the same man, but the writer Luke is trying to reveal to us another very significant side to this story that we may miss if we read over this too quickly.

You see, Joseph was a Levite, born in Cyprus, who owned a tract of land in Jerusalem. Now why is that significant? It's significant because the Levites (one of the tribes of Israel) were specifically instructed in the Mosaic Law to receive no inheritance in the land.

As part of the tribe of Levi, each priest was told that his inheritance was the Lord himself. All the Levite priests were to derive their living from the temple, live in the temple chambers, and eat from the temple sacrifices.

When the originally Promised Land was divided in 11 portions, the tribe of Levi was excluded. So what was this priest named Joseph, this Levite, doing with a

tract of land, a prime piece of property in the heart of Jerusalem?

I wonder if his ownership of that property was common knowledge. I bet it wasn't. In fact, it would have been a public disgrace to him and his family if this was known. He would have forfeited his right to being a priest. He would have been "fired" using today's terminology. Surely when he came forward with this land sale it raised a few eyebrows among the Jewish Christians that a Levite had so blatantly disqualified himself from the priesthood. If this would have happened today, our media would have been all over this scandal.

But do you notice what's missing in this account of Joseph's act of radical generosity? There's no condemnation given here. Look at how simply and

how gently the word of God handles it. Joseph, a Levite priest, who owned a tract of land, sold it.

What an encouragement that must have been to the church! He may have been Joseph when he owned it, he may have been Joseph, whom the disciples called Barnabas when he sold it. But from the time he lays the proceeds of the sale at the disciple's feet, from then on, he is only called Barnabas, the son of encouragement.

I'm sure you are probably wondering, "What's the big deal here?"

The big deal is this: Barnabas is a broken man. Do you see what's going on here? There was a huge risk involved here. He didn't know how people would respond to this scandalous revelation of a priest owning land. And do you know what?

That's always the way it is.

Barnabas: Son of Encouragement

You never know how people will respond when you remove your shiny mask and reveal what's really going on in your life. There's always a risk involved.



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There's always risk in admitting your priorities have been wrong, or that you have been holding onto something that you should have given up long ago or never had to begin with.

You risk your status as a shiny person, whenever you do that and come clean and admit you were wrong about something. But when you do, oh my,

what an encouragement it is to the church! What an example of brokenness and humility. You see, there's no glory in this for Barnabas, He's admitting his sin. But oh what Glory it brings to God.

Some of you here today are afraid to stop being shiny because you don't know how you'll be treated. You wonder is it safer to stay behind the veil and keep up the facade. If that describes you today, then you need to learn from Barnabas. He took a risk. He lifted the veil and became incredibly honest, transparent and vulnerable with his life. And when we lift the veil and reveal our brokenness, we become models of authenticity and vulnerability, and in the end, that encourages others to do the same.

Conclusion

You see, when we are being open, honest and transparent with our lives, God is glorified even though we take a huge risk in doing so. Brokenness and not shiny-ness is what the world needs. And being transparent about our brokenness is part of what you do in the upside down community of Jesus.

Also, when we as a church, become of “one heart and one soul” and share common beliefs and values and then live out those values through conscious acts of authenticity and radical generosity, the bible says the “word of God will spread and the number of believers is multiplied”.

And THAT my friends is what it looks like when abundant grace is at work in the church. So as we bring this message to a close, listen to this final song and

let it serve as an anthem of commitment for all of us to live a Barnabas-style life. Let us all become sons and daughters of encouragement through our oneness, authenticity and radical generosity. Let's pray.

Closing song:

“If We’re Honest” (Francesca Battistelli)

Closing Comments

Update on \$ for PALS project. \$13,700 towards our goal of \$25K

New Foundations of Marriage SG (those married 5 years or less, engaged or seriously dating)